

Michael Bryanton

POLICY QUESTIONS FOR APPOINTEE TO THE WATERWAYS COMMISSION

1. What do you envision to be your role as a commissioner on the Waterways Commission?
To provide safe public access to the Great Lakes and inland waterways of Michigan; to oversee the use of dedicated funds provided by boaters and to support the acquisition, construction and operation of the necessary infrastructure.
2. Given the current budget situation, do you believe that funding for the Harbor Development fund should be a priority or should we consider redirecting registration fees into other programs?
Registration fees are the funding mechanism for this program. The Harbor Development Program was designed to create public/private partnerships in the development of marina facilities. This opportunity has proven to be beneficial to the local economy. Unspent funds have been historically transferred into the Waterways Fund, and used for boating infrastructure improvements statewide. Therefore, the funds for this program directly benefit Michigan boaters and should not be redirected to other programs.
3. What emphasis would you place on waterways projects and harbor development in the Upper Peninsula?
While the harbor of refuge system has been completed in the upper Peninsula, difficult Great Lakes conditions, especially on Lake Superior, demand continued upgrades and improvements to meet current standards at Upper Peninsula facilities because safe boating access in the upper peninsula remains sporadic and inadequate.
4. How do you regard the current status of the State's harbors waterways? Are there pressing needs that must be addressed in order for the state to properly safeguard boaters who use our waterways? If so, what are those needs?
The State needs to continue working toward a completed harbor refuge system. Dredging needs exist due to low water levels, which have become a safety issue. The State also needs to continue working with the Army Corps of Engineers and holding them responsible for maintaining their designated dredging areas.
5. Are you in favor of raising the boater registration fees in order to fund harbor development and waterways projects?
The number of registered watercraft determines the amount of federal funding available for waterways development projects. Currently there are no fees for non-motorized watercraft (smaller canoes and kayaks). Registering non-motorized watercraft can increase the amount of federal funding the DNR receives and may not necessitate increasing the fees on individual registrations,
6. What types of state and local programs could be created to support the funding of harbor development in this state?
The funding for waterways facilities (both local and State) comes from the state gas tax, boat registrations, and facility revenues (access site permits, fuel sales, etc.). An increase in the number of registrations would provide additional funding for harbor development.
7. Do you believe that the Waterways Commission is an essential advisory committee, or could it be absorbed by the Natural Resources Commission?
P.A. 320 of 1947 created the Waterways Commission to oversee, advise, and support the development of safe and adequate facilities for boating. The legislation also uniquely identifies boating backgrounds and knowledge, which contributes to the experience Waterways Commissioners bring in their advisory role. I do not believe that the NRC could meet the intent of the Legislation that created the Waterways Commission.

8. What do you feel is the single largest threat to providing ready or proper access for boaters to our lakes?
There is a growing need for safe and adequate boating access to Great Lakes, inland lakes, and rivers. Challenges include the permitting process, waterfront development, and lack of local support. The trend has been for riparian owners to hinder new boating access site development through legal challenges.
9. Do you believe lake associations should be able to set standards (number of vessels, hours of operation, etc.) for usage in order to safeguard the quality of the lakes?
Under the Marine Safety Act, Townships can initiate local watercraft ordinances (Lake Associations can work with them). Lake boards can determine scope of project and establish lake levels (P.A. 451, Part 309 - Inland Lake Improvements). There, lake associations already have the ability, in part, to set standards.
10. What is your view of current legislation that will allow back lot property owners to keep boats, jet skis, boat hoists and docks on our inland lakes through mandatory marinas authorized by local units of government?
The back lot property owners, as with the general public, have no riparian rights. I would not support development of marinas for back lot property owners on inland lakes if they diminish public recreational boating opportunities or increase safety concerns.
11. What specific experience and knowledge base do you bring to the Waterways Commission?
As an avid boater with over 15 years of boating experience on the Great Lakes and inland waterways, I have a genuine interest in of Michigan's waterways for both commercial and recreational use.
12. How are the lower lake levels affecting harbors and waterways? What can the state do to help?
There is a problem seen on great lakes statewide. There is limited-to-no-use at some facilities and regions of the state due to low water. Possible remedies include using a state grant-in-aid program for improvements/upgrades to waterways facilities. Federal grant funds are also available for improvements/upgrades to waterways facilities.
13. Should the DEQ marina permitting process be eliminated or streamlined?
A DEQ permit is required to meet state laws and requirements for work at marinas, dams, in wetlands, and in floodplains to name a few. A permit from the US Army Corp of Engineers may also be required if work is to be performed on a great lake or connecting inland waterway. The DEQ permitting process protects public health, natural resources, and recreational boating opportunities and should not be eliminated.
14. Should the state provide support to marina owners for dredging?
The grant-in-aid program provides grant funding for publicly owned and operated marinas for both engineering studies and infrastructure improvements. Currently, funding is inadequate to meet the dredging needs of public facilities and dredging private facilities would further diminish these limited funds.

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November 19, 2007

Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop
Attn: William H. Sullivan
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

Enclosed please find my responses to your "Policy Questions for Appointee to the Waterways Commission."

I look forward to moving forward with the confirmation hearings on this commission so that I may begin my work on the Waterways Commission. In the meantime, if I can provide additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike Bryanton". The signature is fluid and written in dark ink.

Mike Bryanton